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Buenos Aires

May 16, 1979

[REDACTED]
Mr. Claus W. Ruser, Director
ARA/ECA, East Coast Affairs,
Room 4908
Department of State,
Washington, D. C. 20520

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

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Date _____ Declassify on _____ Reason _____

Dear Claus:

[REDACTED] This is in hasty reply to your letter of May 11. When is a disappearance not a disappearance? At the moment all we have which are not qualified are strange phone calls and notes saying they are well are the junk man and the A.I. case of Morero. Yvonne has been checking with all the human rights groups and can find no trace of the latter. If she can't come up with some traces by weekend we will be responding with a request for more information, such as where and when, and a local address for the missing person.

[REDACTED] The thesis that so long as the repressive apparatus remains in place illegal operations will continue as the virtues of many catch-phrases: there may be some truth to it. However it can also be misleading. To the extent that the security apparatus is part of a disciplined, if deliberately decentralized system, it is susceptible to some command and control. The dramatic reduction in disappearances is evidence of that. It also has the potential for and a lot of practice at illegal operations, so if the spirit moves some group they can go off and commit all sorts of atrocities. The converse is not true, however. Removing the security forces does not remove the capability or disposition to engage in criminal activities. The police have been legendary for this for years. We hear that Admiral Massera has his own group of thugs, and that General Suarez Mason has a tight little group of hard guys willing to do his bidding. This is in the fine old Argentine tradition of resorting to force when you can't get your way otherwise. In this kind of context the threat of an adverse MDB vote continues to be surreal.

[REDACTED] Thanks for the COHA flier on the Georgetown seminar. We can have some fun around here with that, but not with Bunge (who lacks even a shred of a sense of humor). We had a pretty good idea something of the sort would happen, and tried to hint

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

Page 2
Mr. Claus W. Ruser
May 16, 1979

to Bunge, but he's not used to being criticized. Bill Barnes of Fletcher who has been down here at Aja Espil's invitation to look at the Beagle problem thought the seminar was pretty good. It has gotten a very limited, but good press down here so far.

(U) Since the opportunity arises so seldom, I am going to engage in the luxury of 'I told you so.' There is enclosed a copy of my letter of last August to Jim Bumpus on the outlook for the AU seminar. It is one of the few instances in which my crystall ball was completely clear.

██████ Col. San Roman told Ken Sackett just a couple of hours ago that we would be getting 4 or 5 right of option cases on this week's list. He also said that the PEN prisoners were down to 2100, but Ken was unable to go into detail with him on how that came about, as our figures would be several hundred higher. Ken says he believes San Roman on this since his figures have always ~~soared~~ with the figures on the bulletin boards in the prisons which show prisoner totals by category. We will presumably be getting an explanation of how the total was lowered, though it may not be from San Roman. We have now been told by the Foreign Office that we are to deal with them on right of option, not the Ministry of Interior. San Roman, who has been helpful and a candid source, says the reason is that the FO wants to be the channel of information to the Foreign embassies for otherwise it rarely knows what's going on. San Roman also told Ken that there were a total of 133 prisoners who have received the Right of Option under the current and previous programs.

██████ Tony will be delighted to get your bouquets on his fine reporting. He will probably be able to tell you more than you really wanted to hear about the military's relations with various elements of the labor movement and the range of opinion within the military on how the movement should be organized. He suspects that perhaps the current government is capable of some reforms which could have a fundamental effect on the political power of organized labor and could change the rules by which modern Argentine politics have been played for the past 35 years. I regain my skepticism. The local assumption is that any military leader who wants to retain a CGT-type organization does so with

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

Page 3
Mr. Claus W. Ruser
May 16, 1979

a view towards receiving its support in a presidential election -- the Peron pattern. We know that there has been a lot of division within the armed forces over the trade union law, and it will be interesting to see what it looks like after these extended birth pangs.

██████ Rumors of Aja Espil's replacement are periodic. We have not heard any for several weeks, so we had not given the matter much attention. It is true that he has been a lightning rod for the criticism of the US responding to US criticism of Argentina. I would not be surprised to see him go any day, but have no reason to expect that at the moment. There was virtually no play of the Zorinsky letter in the Argentine press.

██████ Your marginal note on the Beagle dispute appears to read that you have seen disclaimers of hostile Videla statements. Some press source told a mission member that Videla had to say something stiff since he was rumored to have said earlier when asked about the possibility of unsatisfactory mediation, "better to lose to the Pope than to Chile." We will check closely to confirm any reports of untimely Argentine military maneuvers. I do not recall seeing any such reports, but we will put the Attaches to work.

Sincerely,

Maxwell Chaplin
Chargé d'affaires

MC:mmmp
Encl.

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